



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

FIRST VISA FRAUD CONSPIRATOR SENTENCED TO 30 MONTHS

Scheme allowed scores to illegally enter dozens of countries

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa—The first of two conspirators convicted of participating in a worldwide visa fraud organization uncovered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents was sentenced Friday in federal court here.

Unis Bah, 38, of Sierra Leone, was sentenced in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Iowa to 30 months in prison without parole and fined \$5,000 for making false statements to ICE agents. He pleaded guilty to the crime Aug. 10.



Fraudulent passports

In sentencing Bah, U.S. District Court Judge Linda Reade said, “This is a very serious case. It implicates the safety of the borders of the United States as well as the borders of the allies of the United States.”

Friday’s sentencing was the result of an investigation launched by local ICE agents into an international visa fraud organization that allowed scores of unknown people to illegally enter as many as 23 countries worldwide using fraudulently obtained visitor’s visas.

“Our job is to restore integrity to this nation’s legal immigration system,” said Michael Vail, resident agent-in-charge of the ICE Cedar Rapids office. “In this case, we’ve also helped other countries strengthen the integrity of their immigration systems.” Vail said that several foreign governments that cooperated with ICE’s investigation have tightened their requirements for obtaining visas.

Abdulaziz Bah (his relation to Unis Bah is unknown), a co-conspirator in the scheme, was convicted in February in the same court on two counts of possessing fraudulent documents and one count of conspiracy to defraud the government. Abdulaziz Bah is also required to forfeit \$325,000, which represents the proceeds of his unlawful activity. He is awaiting sentencing.

After serving their sentences, both men will be placed in removal proceedings, which may result in deportation back to their home countries. Congress has mandated through the nation's immigration laws that criminal aliens be processed for removal.

The scheme in which both men were participants involved creating identities for imposters so that they appeared to be permanent residents, or "green card" holders, of the United States. The U.S. documents produced for the scheme were primarily permanent resident cards and Social Security cards. The conspirators also obtained high-quality counterfeit passports from African countries such as Guinea, Sierra Leone and Senegal.

The conspirators then filled out visa applications and mailed them, along with the fraudulent identity documents, to foreign consular offices located within the United States. The consular offices, believing the applicants were approved U.S. legal immigrants, would issue visas and mail them to U.S. addresses, including addresses in Cedar Rapids.

The conspirators then moved the visas and related false identity documents overseas, where unknown persons assumed the identities and traveled to the target countries for entry. The false identity documents seized by ICE investigators showed that the imposters were primarily males from various African countries between 16 and 45 years old.

"We don't know who these people were," said Vail. "These are methods that criminals and terrorists employ." Vail said that his investigators determined that some imposters, once they entered the target country, didn't follow the planned itineraries as a requirement of the visa application process. "Once they entered these countries, they simply vanished. The ICE investigation plugged a significant hole in international security."

ICE investigators estimate that over the past several years, hundreds of these imposters used the fraudulently obtained visas to illegally enter countries worldwide. The countries most frequently targeted for illegal entry were: Ireland, Belgium, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands, but as many as 18 additional countries have been identified as having been targeted.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard Murphy of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Iowa prosecuted the Unis Bah case.

ICE was assisted in the investigation by the North Central Field Intelligence Unit of the Office of Intelligence, a division of ICE, and by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Cedar Rapids Police Department and the FBI.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.